

5-16-00 NY Dem.
Convention - Accep. Speech

New York State Democratic Convention—Acceptance Speech
Pepsi Arena, Albany, NY

May 16, 2000

Thank you. Thank you so very, very much. Thank you for this evening.

Thank you for all the support and the help and the advice that so many of you have given me. I cannot thank the people in this hall enough, but let me begin by thanking Congressman Rangel and Congresswoman Lowey and all the other Democratic Members of the House.

Let me thank Senator Schumer, all New Yorkers owe you, Chuck, a debt of thanks for your tireless leadership. You have led the fight to reduce crime and gun violence, to keep our children safe. You have led the fight to improve the upstate economy to bring good jobs to the entire state and I look forward to working with you. I will have more to say in a few minutes about Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, one of the wisest most knowledgeable, most experienced public servants in American history.

I have also benefited, as all New Yorkers have, from the encouragement and counsel of good friends and outstanding public officials like Comptroller Carl McCall, Attorney General Eliot Spitzer, Speaker Shelly Silver, Secretary Andrew Cuomo, Democratic Leader Marty Conner and our great party chair Judith Hope.

To the thousands of New York Democrats who make a difference every day in city halls and county governments and union halls, boardrooms, classrooms, and in court rooms in Albany and in Washington. It is all of you who are the reasons why we are winning elections across the state. From Chautauqua to Westchester and Nassau, Republicans are being replaced by Democrats who are solving problems--not just playing politics.

That is nothing new.

Time and time again, the great leaders of New York's Democratic Party have brought us together for the common good. It was, after all, New York Democrats who led the way in building the great American middle class; in giving rise to

the labor movement, to civil rights, to women's rights, to gay rights; in furthering our commitments to public education and old age security.

From Al Smith to Eleanor and Franklin Roosevelt, from Herbert Lehman to Robert Wagner to Robert Kennedy to Daniel Patrick Moynihan, New York has always led the way. And we will continue leading by building on the progress of the last seven years: 21 million new jobs, balanced budgets, lower crime, stronger schools, better childcare, a cleaner environment, and a safer and more inclusive American community. Our thanks must go to Vice President Al Gore and President Bill Clinton.

I am delighted that the President is here this evening and I am so grateful for his support. I would not be standing here tonight were it not for Bill, and were it not for all he has done for me. I could not be prouder as an American and as a New Yorker to have a President who has meant so much to our country. We are a better country than we were in 1990.

And we are a stronger and a better Democratic Party. We are dedicated to the values of community, opportunity, responsibility, and enterprise. We stand for innovation, diversity, and inclusion. We're ready to take action and demonstrate leadership.

I am here tonight because as noble and rich as our past is, along with all of you, I believe that New York's future can be even better if we work hard to make it so.

I believe that we can strengthen our families and create the opportunities every child needs to succeed in a new century. I believe we can reach across the lines that often divide us -- geography and race and religion, class and even party -- to bring people together to fulfill our common mission. Because I believe in those core values and I believe in those goals and I believe with all my heart that if we work together we can make our future even better, I am deeply honored and humbled to accept the nomination of the New York Democratic Party.

I am honored because you are offering me the privilege of representing this state, its families and children, as well as our party. I am humbled because I know I have very big shoes to fill. After all, who has stood for our Democratic values more than the senior senator from New York? Senator Moynihan

has what the Irish call the gift of being able to see around corners. Long before our nation awoke to the risk, he warned us of the threat that demographic changes posed to the Social Security system. Nearly a decade before the Berlin wall crumbled, he forecast the collapse of the Soviet Union and he urged Americans to prepare for a post Cold War world. He warned us of the breakdown of the family and reminded us that family was the bedrock of our society.

In 1993, the President's economic plan -- the plan that erased the deficits and created surplus -- passed by one vote thanks to Senator Moynihan's great leadership as Chairman of the Senate Finance Committee. Pat Moynihan has served our nation for 5 decades with his thought, his ideas and his actions. He served four Presidents and he served in the Senate with four more. There is not a person in this party, in this state or nation who is not in his debt, and I am at the top of that list.

On behalf of all of us, I also want to thank Liz Moynihan for her warmth, her support and her encouragement. You know Liz Moynihan is a great friend and a great champion for New York. And Liz, when you advised me to travel upstate last summer, I listened and 62 counties later, I can say, "That was wonderful advice." And by the way, just for the history books, I think Liz is the most successful campaign manager in our state's history. After all, she has managed winning four Senate races in a row, which has to be a record that will never be broken.

So Senator, we are forever in your debt and we wish you and Liz well. However, we still expect to see you both around and we still expect to hear about every historical event that ever occurred anywhere in New York State. We are looking forward to knowing even more about what has happened before so that we can be better supporters of the history of New York, and we can learn how we can build on that history for the future.

I am excited by the chance to be a part of that future, and I pledge to you that I will work my heart out every day of this campaign to become your next Senator. And I will work everyday in the Senate to keep faith with you and with the values and the ideals of the Democratic Party of New York. Because make no mistake about it, this election is not about me or about any Republican opponent, it is about the people

of New York and the common mission that we are pledged to.

What is that mission?

It is to strengthen our families, to protect our children, to improve our schools, and to extend health care to every New Yorker. It is to free our families and communities from the terror of gun violence; to strengthen Social Security and modernize Medicare; and to ensure America's continued leadership in the world.

Despite the strides and progress we have made, there are still too many forgotten New Yorkers. I have met them. I have been in diners sitting across from parents who tell me with pain in their eyes about their child who has been diagnosed with a mental illness but they cannot afford to get the best treatment for their child.

I have met the children. We need to put faces on those statistics to demonstrate what it is like to be caught up in poverty and despair and to be without the families and the health care and the education they need to prepare them for the future.

I have met the mothers and fathers working fulltime who are stressed because they have too little money and too little time. I have traveled upstate where the economy that the Erie Canal opened up is now looking for revitalization and hope.

We have some of the greatest institutions of higher education in the world and we still have too many students who cannot afford to go to college.

We have some of the best public schools in the world. Yet far too many of our students are crammed into overcrowded and dilapidated buildings without the resources that are needed for the education they require.

We have the finest hospitals in the world. Yet more than half a million children in our state do not have health insurance and over two million older New Yorkers cannot afford their prescription drugs.

We have the most beautiful scenery -- from the Finger Lakes to the Adirondacks to Long Island's beaches. Yet we face environmental challenges to our air, our water, and our health.

We are home to the dynamic financial capital of the world. Yet we have family farms and businesses upstate and neighborhoods downstate that are not yet enjoying the benefits of the new economy.

We are producing countless new fortunes. Yet we have the second highest rate of poverty of any state in the country. Now I know and you know that we can do better and New York should not settle for less than the best.

There is something for each of us to do - not just those of us honored to be running for or holding office. There is something for each of us to do in our homes and families and our work places and neighborhoods. Every one of us can make a commitment to improving the life of a child or providing better jobs and to doing more to make our community safer and cleaner.

As your Senator, I pledge to work with you to fulfill that mission. I will work with you to make sure that we keep our national fiscal house in order because if we do not, then New York will be especially disadvantaged.

We have to make sure that we balance our budget and make sure we use our surpluses to pay down the national debt, protect Social Security for generations to come and strengthen Medicare with a prescription drug benefit for every older New Yorker.

We have to continue investing in our children. What does that mean? I think that means we have to keep working for higher standards for schools and students and teachers. We do need smaller classes for our children. We need modern, state-of-the-art schools in rural areas as well as urban ones and we have to teach our children what I call the six R's -- not just reading 'riting and 'rithmetic, but how about responsibility, respect, and results?

In order to do that, we have to make sure every child has a chance to get off to a good start. That is why I will fight to make sure that every child who needs good child care or a Head Start program or an after school program will have that opportunity.

Because I have a lot of experience as every parent here does, in balancing family and work, I will continue to advocate for

ways that we can make it possible for parents to be both good parents and good workers. Let's expand the family and medical leave options. Let's use technology to make work more available and accessible for parents.

And while we are at it, let's make sure that we make work pay. You know a lot of New Yorkers are working very hard but many feel that they are not making any progress. I want to work everyday as your Senator to provide the kind of tuition deduction that will enable every family to send their children to college in our state.

I want to make it possible for a family to care for a disabled loved one, for aging parents in our homes. That means I want to support a tax credit for long-term care. We should be rewarding responsible families not penalizing them.

Let's make sure that when people work full time, they get the pay that they deserve. That is why I support a higher minimum wage and protecting workers' rights. Let's once and for all ensure that women receive equal pay for equal work.

We also have to stand up to the special interests that stand in our way. "Enough is enough" is the message to the gun lobby. That was the message on Sunday at the Million Mom March. No more should we be silent, as the gun lobby refuses to put our children's health and safety first. We must end the terror of violence in our streets and schools by adopting common sense gun safety measures.

We know they will work. Remember when the gun lobby said that if the President was able to pass the Brady Bill, it would destroy the rights of gun owners? Remember when the gun lobby said that if we ban assault weapons -- a measure Senator Schumer fought for -- it would destroy the rights of gun owners?

I have traveled all over this state and I have yet to meet a gun owner who has missed the hunting season or an opportunity to go sport shooting. We know that taking the assault weapons off the streets and passing the Brady Bill kept 500,000 fugitives, felons and stalkers from buying the guns that would have killed and maimed New Yorkers.

We will also keep working until we finally achieve the goal of providing quality, affordable health care to every New Yorker

and every American. There are steps we have to take -- smaller steps -- that are achievable until we can reach that goal. That is why I will continue to fight to provide coverage for mental health problems because it is not right that we deny treatment for people who are suffering the diseases of the mind when we treat diseases for every other organ of our body.

We also have to be sure that we continue the fight that Senator Moynihan and Senator Schumer are waging to provide the financial support for our hospitals and nursing homes.

And we have to continue to fight for affordable prescription drugs. That is why I proposed the bill that we would re-import from Canada FDA-approved American drugs. And we must have a Patient's Bill of Rights so that doctors and nurses are calling the shots on health care.

We have a big challenge ahead of us here at home because we have to prepare all New Yorkers for the global economy. That means we should be taking advantage of new technology.

I believe that as a nation we should be providing broadband access to the Internet for the entire country. Just as President Roosevelt electrified the United States, we should connect the entire country particularly the rural areas in upstate New York.

But we have to be sure that people are ready to do those jobs. That is why I propose technology bonds and regional skills alliances to prepare people for the jobs of the new economy.

We need new incentives to create jobs, to support agriculture, to reduce airfares and to lower electric rates. I look forward to working with Senator Schumer and all of the people throughout the state -- particularly upstate and in depressed areas downstate -- so that we can look back on this year and this convention and say that we did what was necessary to provide the jobs that would keep young people who want to stay in Western and Central and Southern New York. That will be our first priority in the Senate.

But we also have to make sure that our state and our country

are not divided. We have to work for one New York and one America. I hope that this year, even before I am in Washington, we will finally have state and federal laws against hate crimes.

It is just not right. No New Yorker, no American, should be the target of violence on account of their race, their gender, their religion, their disability or their sexual orientation. We must stand against hate wherever it rears its ugly head.

We also have to be sure that we are up to meeting the challenges that are around the corner. Yes we want to reap the benefits of the Internet revolution, but we also want to protect the privacy of our financial, personal and medical records.

We want to grow our economy but we want to do it while protecting our environment and the health of our children and grandchildren.

One of the ways we will get more help on all of these issues, is continuing Senator Moynihan's fight for New York's fair share from Washington. If we are able to get back some of those dollars that we send to Washington, it will enable local governments to lower our property taxes and use those dollars to meet the issues we face right here at home.

I pledge that I will also stand against those policies that would hurt New York and America. And I will need your help to do that. Together we must stand against a Republican leadership that is set on irresponsible fiscal policies that threaten to return us to the bad old days of sky-rocketing deficits and recurring recessions.

One thing that the President is fond of saying is that when he became President, once again the rules of arithmetic were followed in Washington. Well, we need to be sure that they stay in place and that is one of the many reasons why we must elect Al Gore President of the United States.

We also need a President like Al Gore to stand with us against any attempt to restrict a woman's right to choose and against any Supreme Court nominee who would do so.

And let's all pledge to stand against the mean-spirited politics of revenge and retribution that put partisanship before

progress.

As I travel this state, what I hear from people in every county is their hopes and dreams and aspirations for their children and themselves.

I have heard countless stories -- sitting on back porches and standing in backyards, sitting around kitchen tables, walking through supermarkets and in every place you can imagine. These stories have touched me.

But you know I have also heard stories that have left a knot in my stomach, and have really said to me, "nobody's paying attention, nobody knows how hard it is, nobody cares."

So what is this election really about? As I said, it is not about candidates. It is about our children, our families and about our futures.

It is about Donna Centrella, a cancer patient in Massena who knows first hand what thousands and thousands of other New Yorkers know -- what it means to confront a serious illness without health insurance. We owe it to Donna and so many others like her to make sure that she gets the treatment she needs and that we all get the health insurance we deserve.

This election is about Central Islip High School and so many other schools I have been in throughout the state. As I walked through the halls of Central Islip with the principal, doors opened on classrooms that used to be closets. I was told that it is so overcrowded that there is no space to offer students the extra classrooms they need to prepare for the Regents exams. We owe it to Principal John Smith and his teachers and students to invest in our schools so that the next generation of New Yorkers is ready to lead us forward in to a new century.

What is this election about?

Well, it is about Jill and Robert Kneer whom Chuck Schumer and I met. They work full time -- both of them -- and they are struggling to cover the tuition costs for two children already in college and a third who will enroll in the fall. We owe it to the Kneers and tens of thousands of others to give them the support and relief they need because if they have a child who is motivated and wants to go to college, there will be no

financial obstacles.

What is this election about?

Well it is about Marie Kaplan. A breast cancer survivor who believes with all of her heart that there are environmental connections to her illness. She is worried about her daughter and all of our daughters, and we owe it to her to invest in the medical research to find out once and for all why so many areas of our state have higher than average rates of cancer and asthma and other diseases.

If we look at all of these stories we know that there are nearly 19 million stories. There are stories in every community in this state and I have heard them from people throughout the state.

I have heard them from young entrepreneurs starting jobs in Buffalo that cannot find people to fill those jobs even though they pay \$60,000 a year.

I have heard it from single moms in Albany who are not getting any child support and are working full time and are stretched so thin they do not know how they are going to hold it together.

I have seen and I have listened and I have learned. And I know that we owe it to every one of these people to make sure we give our best efforts to build on the progress we have made. But we must not allow ourselves to become complacent. We cannot say that everything is fine, because we know its not. We must have that same can-do spirit of hope and optimism that built this state in the first place.

There is much we can do and much we must do.

In six months New Yorkers will vote for a President and I know that everyone here will do all we can to ensure that Al Gore is the choice of New York and America. And in six months New Yorkers will elect a new Senator. I have said in many different places that when it comes time to vote, I do not believe this election is about me or about my opponent.

I believe it comes down to some very simple questions we have to ask ourselves. Will we pull together as a state? Will we decide that there is no upstate or downstate or rural,

suburban or urban or black or white or brown but just one New York unified and committed to doing the very best for every child, everywhere, in every corner of New York?

Will we therefore work together, toward our common mission of lifting up all of our children and families to ensure that there are no more forgotten New Yorkers?

Will we seize this moment and commit ourselves to work as hard as we can to lift the sights of all our children, to ease the burdens of all our elderly, sick and vulnerable citizens, to spark the enterprising genius of all our young people to make our state all it can be?

If the answer to those questions is, "yes" then that is the resounding answer we should take forward from this hall. This is the chance of a lifetime and the test by what we will be judged on is whether we as a party and as a people are up to meeting the challenge.

I believe we are. I know that we can do this together. If you will help me, I will work my heart out to make it happen.

Thank you all very much.